



Is Real World Learning in Grades K-12 Classified?

CONFIDENTIAL

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Purpose: To challenge, rethink, and re-shape our curriculum & learning

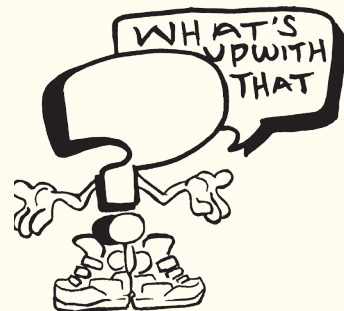
It seems studying critical issues and accurate histories are classified in most school curriculum.

We rarely get to look critically at our own lives, our communities, our city, and the real world. Why is that?
Is it classified? Top secret? Off limits? Or what?

In this, the issue, RK wants to know **why** the topic of Chicago is taught very little in Chicago's schools, **why** we rarely get to learn about our own communities, **why** immigrant students' first languages and cultures aren't respected in curriculum, and **why** European and U.S. histories of violent conquest are turned into a love fest of "explorers" and "settlers" among other things.

We also introduce a new series that looks at the critical history of Chicago public schools while returning to student inquiries launched last issue into Ethnic Studies curriculum, critical current events (police killing), textbook comparisons (McDougal's *American History* text and CGCT's *Urban Renewal or Urban Removal?* text), and the power of local street art in learning. And of course, KinderQuestions returns!

Read on, make critiques, and respond on our RK Tumblr page to anything that stands out. Encourage your teachers, schools, and districts to stop making meaningful issues that personally affect us "CLASSIFIED".



\$1.00 Donation
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ROOT KNOWLEDGE

A Grassroots Journal by
Students, Parents, Educators

SUBMISSIONS INVITATION

Root Knowledge student editors invite youth, parents & educators to submit writing, art, photos, ideas, poetry, etc. We're concerned with critical issues in education, classroom learning, and systemic analysis of issues in our communities.

CGCT CONTACT INFO

Email us at:
chicagotaskforce@gmail.com

Call us at:
773.275.2428

Friend us on
Facebook/Chicago Grassroots Curriculum Taskforce

Tweet us at:
#the_cgct

Tumblr:
rootknowledge.tumblr.com

Send mail to:
CGCT, 4554 N. Broadway,
Chicago, Il., 60640, ste 326

Little Chicago Learning in Chicago

By Kevin Kauffman, 1st Year Teacher

Recent studies have shown that students, teachers, and parents agree that schools would improve by incorporating real world learning into the curriculum. In Chicago Public Schools, a few schools have listened to these concerns and put together courses in Chicago History or Urban Studies. However, most CPS high schools do not offer these types of courses, giving students no options to study the **history of their own city in the classroom.**

In a report from the Coalition for Community Schools, researchers concluded that **communities provide a natural context for learning that help build on students' prior knowledge and highlight issues they care about.** For this study, 9 schools across 3 different states adopted community-based learning (CBL), which includes place-based learning, civic education, and service learning. Evaluations showed that the CBL model led to growth in teacher enthusiasm and increases in student engagement in learning, academic achievement, and knowledge about the social and natural environment.

Right now, CPS provides teachers with the Social Science Content Framework, which helps teachers create curriculum by offering potential topics, central questions, and resources for every grade level. Some of the essential

questions for 8th and 9th graders include: "Who should govern? How do powerful individuals and masses drive political change? What is the role of individuals in their community and in the world?" The history of Chicago could provide the perfect setting for students to explore these issues and build an identity of their community. With this in mind, it seems that teachers can easily fit in CBL-centered curriculum into their classrooms.

In Illinois, teachers and students have recently organized a state-appointed taskforce to push for reform of civic education. They recommended that the state should require that high-school students must take and pass a civics class in order to graduate. A recent poll showed that **57% strongly favored** this requirement and **23% somewhat favored** it. Their report said that current civics classes focus on rote memorization rather than discussion and debate.

While there is a lack right now, the CPS schools that offer Chicago History/Urban Studies courses can lead the way and help others build curriculum and courses that focus on community history. Teachers and students have proven that by voicing their concerns and organizing action, they can help lead the way for a more culturally relevant course selection. □

Share your stories about classroom learning, whether you're critiquing irrelevance or honoring great curriculum.

Also, write about the critical issues or problems in society you think we should learn more about in school!
NEXT DEADLINE IS JUNE 10TH.

Meet the RK Editorial Team!



Jada Yolich
Managing Editor



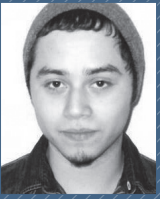
Allende Miglietta
Environmental Issues



Pedro Gonzalez
Immigration Issues



Vanessa Hensler
Current Events



Jaime Camargo
Social Analysis



Lucero Segundo
Critical Arts Review



Cinthya Rodriguez
Curriculum Issues



Alex Ng
Electoral Coverage

KinderQuestions!

Welcome to KinderQuestions! This transcribed column will feature actual inquiries and questions regarding a social topic of concern by a different child in kindergarten each issue. The

following questions and comments you're about to read come directly from the mouth of an inquiring young person here in Chicago, Illinois.



This edition of KinderQuestions comes from Mia, a 7-year-old first grader in CPS.

What do you want to talk about?

Kids shouldn't watch a lot of Disney movies because they rot your brain. In *Lady and the Tramp*, they make black cats the bad characters. In *The Princess and the Frog*, the white characters are rich. The evil characters have dark skin. A lot of other TV shows and games are also racist.

How so?

There are a lot of games for girls about dressing up, getting married. They think that girls only like doing stuff like putting on makeup, doing their hair, trying on outfits, or texting on their phone. They think boys only like playing sports and checking out girls.

Those games are sexist and racist because our society is sexist and racist. We watch some of those movies and shows and play those games. So what should we do about that?

We need to not watch them because they rot your brain. We have to delete them.

And maybe also talk about them and ask questions about them. What advice do you have for kids and grown-ups? My advice to kids is once you see something or hear something that is racist or sexist, to not watch or listen to it or it is going to rot your brain. It is going to tell you something that is not true.

And you'll believe it and tell other people that. Those things make certain people think they are bad and don't fit in.

Grown-ups need to tell kids to not do that. Because then it's gonna continue, everybody's gonna think it, like "You're bad because you have Black skin and I'm good because I have White skin." Grown-ups need to teach their children so that way their children don't keep saying things, they will hurt someone, it will make them feel bad, and they won't want to go to school and learn.

You've talked about racism and sexism. What questions do you have about those things?

Who started saying racist things? How come there is racism in the world? Did the White people in slavery say racist things to threaten the slaves? Why couldn't the African people be left alone? They should've never put them in slavery. Why did Black and White kids have different schools? Why couldn't they just have one school all together? How could we stop racism?

Anything else?

That's it. I don't have any more. My brain's empty.



Talking about Police Killing in Schools

By Vanessa Hensler, 6th Grade, Burley Elementary

In Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson was not indicted for shooting and killing 18-year-old, Michael Brown. After the news came out, my Social Studies teacher brought up the topic in class. When he asked if we needed to know more about the topic, I was surprised to see that nobody knew anything about Mike Brown, Ferguson or police

killings and shootings. He then went on to tell us the facts about Mike Brown and Darren Wilson. My classmates listened, and I observed the surprise and shock in their eyes. Many of them were learning about this for the first time. A few of my classmates had watery eyes. He had us journal about our feelings and thoughts about the story, and share them.

Every 28 hours, one more Black person is killed by a police officer, security guard, or vigilante citizen. Some of these men and women include **Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Rekia Boyd, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, Freddie Gray** and so many others that didn't deserve

to be killed. Black people are **10 times more likely** to be shot by a police officer than white people. In the first half of 2014, 27 Chicago citizens were shot, and **23 were Black**. Society has built up stereotypes that Black and brown people are "dangerous", "violent", and "criminals".

To explain all of this to students is important, but complicated.

Students need to learn about these topics because they are important social issues and they have a right to know.

a middle school teacher. "I think the events of Ferguson are examples of modern day injustice; injustice that affects everyone, especially students of color". Many teachers have probably wondered about whether or not to discuss the killings of young Black men who didn't deserve to have their lives taken. It is a severe and serious topic, but at the same time very crucial for students to learn about. My grade is a majority of white students, so they need to learn about this so they don't grow up and repeat what has happened.

The problem is that many kids don't learn about things like police killings at home when it is a major part of their lives. Students need to learn about these topics because they are important social issues and they have a right to know.

One of the most important things is how the students react to what they've learned. CPS teacher Cyriac Mathew says, "Students were surprised by learning about the history of the police, because they, like most everyone, [are] under the impression that the job of the police is to protect and serve the people. They felt that learning that history helped make sense of the many police shootings in the news lately."

Marcia Chatelain, a professor at Georgetown University, made the #FergusonSyllabus on Twitter. It helps educators and teachers across the U.S. discuss Ferguson and police killings. "I started a conversation on Twitter to get other college professors to dedicate the first day of classes to talking about Ferguson," she said in an interview.

Teaching this is very important. It is an issue that everyone needs to know about. □

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have you discussed the killing of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in your classroom or Freddie Gray in Baltimore? If yes, what have you learned? If no, what do you want to learn?

How is what happened in Ferguson and Baltimore connected to violence against Black communities in Chicago?

What happens when students do not learn about police brutality?



This article is Part 1 of 3 in an investigation on Ethnic Studies in Chicago's schools. In Part 2, I'll review the newly released Latin American / Latino curriculum recently released by Chicago Public Schools in March.

THE POWER OF POETRY

Based on Mayan ways of knowing, Luis Valdez incorporated the precept of "In Lak'ech" into his poem "Pensamiento Serpentino." Many Latin@ Studies and Chican@ Studies courses discuss this poem. Some classes even open up every class with this section from the poem:

In Lak'ech
Tú eres mi otro yo.
You are my other me.
Si te hago daño a ti,
If I do harm to you,
Me hago daño a mi mismo.
I do harm to myself.
Si te amo y respeto,
If I love and respect you,
Me amo y respeto yo.
I love and respect myself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does this poem relate to Ethnic Studies?

What does this poem mean to you?

If your class/group adopted a poem or lyrics with cultural meaning, which would you recommend and why?

If your class/group wrote a poem, what messages would you emphasize? Why?

Save Ethnic Studies: Save Our Stories (pt. 1 of 3)

By Cinthya Rodriguez, CGCT College Intern

Have you ever taken an **Ethnic Studies** course? Does your school offer one? If not – it's time to do something about it!

While I was growing up, I didn't know about Ethnic Studies. In fact, for a long time, I didn't even know these kinds of courses existed. We often don't know about these classes because our schools don't offer them – why is that?

However, when I was in high school, I had the opportunity to take two Ethnic Studies classes – Latin@¹ Literature and African American Literature. Still, these classes were only available to me because of the **activism of students and teachers** who came before me. People fought to make Ethnic Studies available at my high school, and today students continue to apply pressure to the school administration to make sure the classes continue to exist. In fact, since I left high school, students have organized to make an Asian American Literature class available.

In this way, we all form part of a prolonged struggle. What I mean by this is that we are all fighting to see our humanity affirmed within our schools, to be recognized as peoples with histories and producers of knowledge. Ethnic Studies classes center Black, Latin@, Native, Arab and Asian American voices because these narratives have long been erased or distorted. Often, there are many stories about our communities that don't get told or that we're only told in part. And so Ethnic Studies exists to make us challenge what we've learned about history and ourselves. Ethnic Studies is meant for us to have a space to talk about systems of power, particularly the rule of racism and colonialism, and what they mean for our lives and our communities. We need more spaces for us to ask difficult questions and to talk about the world we want to live in.

Ethnic Studies as a field of study emerges from community activism – most notably, from the work of students of color in the late sixties and early seventies. Their goal was to make sure the university was accountable to and worked

for the community. However, it's clear that this goal hasn't been achieved yet. We continue to honor the sacrifices of those who came before us by continuing to fight. Ethnic Studies classes continue to be seen as a threat to the status quo by many school administrators and elected officials all over the country – including right here in the city of Chicago. In many school districts, these classes have been **banned** or refused the ability to count as required classes.

Today, I am a college student majoring in Ethnic Studies, four years after taking my first Ethnic Studies class in high school. However, as I reflect on my Ethnic Studies experience I realize that a lot of what I've learned is knowledge that was always already in my community. I can't help but think to myself – why did I have to go to college to learn all this? Moreover, I also realize that to engage in Ethnic Studies, you don't necessarily have to do it within a classroom. What are other, grassroots ways in which we can learn about ourselves and our communities outside of an institution?

As we continue to fight for Ethnic Studies and our stories, let's continue to remain critical and grounded in our communities. **Let's not forget our root knowledge.** □



Preserving Language and Culture In Deculturalizing Schools

By Pedro Gonzalez, 12th Grade, Prosser Career Academy

History, regardless of who gets to write it down, is a right everyone should have regardless of who or what a person may be. This right becomes jeopardized when a country's standards, such as the U.S., demands a person be stripped of their language and culture in a process known as **deculturalization and assimilation**. These happen when one group's language, history, and culture come to resemble that of another.¹

For immigrants and their children living in the U.S., the process of assimilating to the United States' language (English) and culture also causes them to be stripped of their own culture. While it may allow them to communicate with their peers, they also become pressured to **only speak English**, which can lead them to lose sight of their own native language. I further explored this struggle by interviewing an 11th grade bilingual student named Jaime, who attends Prosser Career Academy – a high school on the west side of Chicago. During the interview Jaime was asked five questions about his experiences in school:

How were your first years of school in English? "I couldn't read what was on the chalk-



board for most of my first year here which was third grade. I was also told to keep Spanish to myself because it does nothing for learning in this country the next."

What language do you think or process your thoughts in?

"I have thoughts in Spanish and feel unsure of myself when trying to communicate those thoughts because of what I will be told."

Can you explain one of those instances?

"Back in sixth grade I remember researching for a history discussion the next day in class. The topic was World War I and felt really confident about what I read. But when the time came, I didn't speak once because the others would always tease me for mis-pronouncing something or saying the wrong thing."

How often do you speak Spanish outside of school?

"Only when I am around my close friends and sometimes at home."

Do you feel Spanish is tied to your culture?, and why?

"My parents tell me stories of their childhood in Spanish and I have grown to use many of their words when speaking with friends and other relatives. Certain parts of those stories would not be the same

if they were told in any other language. I was told about my culture and heritage in Spanish and that's how I have and will continue to remember it."

This interview with Jaime and my own experiences lead me to conclude that language and culture are linked on an emotional level. It hurts to have to change based on society's standards one lives in. However, in Jaime's situation, along with many other bilingual students, a choice isn't presented.

For further information, a great book is *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*, in which Jason G. Irizarry writes about his experiences teaching Latino students who are often prejudiced against for not being "white" and having to conform to the American Standards. Learning English does more to immigrant students or students of immigrant descent than allowing them to speak with their classmates. Instead they are put down for not speaking English and oppressed by teachers and peers to not speak their native language.

Finally, when we begin to neglect their native language, we ultimately neglect our culture. The education system should be supporting cultural diversity and not be forcing us students to assimilate. □

These photos of Tom Torlino, Navajo, display how many Native Americans were forcibly separated from their people and stripped of their culture, language, and religion.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What is the history of deculturalization and assimilation in the U.S.? What are its purposes?

Were you ever aware of deculturalization and/or assimilation or had a feeling this was happening with people around you?

In what ways is this process being portrayed in the media (TV, Movies, Internet, Music)?

Why is it important to embrace our cultural traditions and languages?

1. The "@" symbol is gender inclusive

1. Ping Chen, *Assimilation of Immigrants and Their Adult Children: College Education, Cohabitation, and Work* (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly, 2010), 7.

This section brings the student's voice on learning and curriculum to the forefront. What do you think about your learning? Get your experiences and ideas, whether positive or negative, featured in the next issue of RK!



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Many authors such as James Loewen and Gloria Ladsen-Billings have documented and opposed the Eurocentric views in U.S. history texts. Why are most history textbooks so Eurocentric or "white washed"? What will it take to ensure all voices and histories are heard? What can students do to help bring about a change in their own learning?

ACTION ACTIVITY

Write a letter to the publishers of a textbook you feel excludes the voices, contributions, and/or realities of people of color and other marginalized people. Support your argument with evidence. Explain your perspective and advocate for changes your class feels are necessary. Then send the letter to the publisher and any local school authorities and/or press representatives. Blast your thoughts on social media!

A Student's Testimony on Curriculum

URUR vs. McDougal Littell American History Book

By Julio Medrano, 7th Grade, Stevenson Middle School

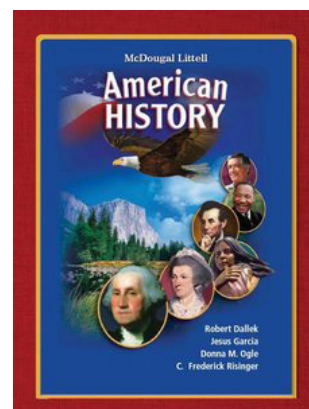
After reading some parts of both books (*Urban Renewal or Urban Removal?*; *American History*), I would say URUR is a better alternative than your typical book on American History. URUR is Chicago history explained, why the city is the way it is, and what to expect further on. American History is just another boring textbook leaving out a lot of people of color that made significant changes in our history. Here's a closer look...

McDougal Littell's American History

This textbook spams you with information on colonies, white men, and wars. This is that kind of history book - and you will be bored in class. This book is boring because it is white-washed and has few views expressed by other cultures besides whites. This book only prepares me for memorizing the U.S. Constitution test. That is the only positive thing about the book to me. This book is pretty much a BIG waste of time since I don't have interest in a white-washed early history of America. Also, McDougal Littell glorifies the U.S. government, meaning the publisher feels students across the U.S. should learn to love the U.S. McDougal Littell's *American History* textbook is a terrible, time-wasting book. When I'm in college, I am going to regret learning about colonists and founding fathers from a one-sided view.

CGCT's Urban Renewal or Urban Removal?

CGCT's *Urban Renewal or Urban Removal?* is a great book to learn the true understanding of Chicago and U.S. history. This book is not white-washed because it has African American and Latino views on many issues such as the housing crisis and Urban Renewal Act. I thought Chicago was first founded by some white guy in the year of Land Taking. But no! A Haitian man of color by the name of **Jean Baptiste Point du Sable** founded the city in the late 1700s. I also wondered who **Richard J. Daley** was and why he is important in Chicago history. Well, it turned out he was a racist mayor because he supported segregated Chicago areas. For example, Englewood is a Black neighborhood with poor quality apartments in need of repairs due to the lack of money put into these communities by



government. On the other side of town, most North side neighborhoods are more white with nice, big houses and an overall nicer environment. Now I know why my family lives in the areas they are living in. *URUR* gets straight to the point. That's why I recommend you read it.

So *URUR* wins the battle because it does not glorify the government, doesn't white-wash history, and is useful in learning about Chicago. *American History* [the book] is just....dumb. I know more students want to be in classes where the teacher teaches from *URUR* and not from a white-washed, boring, heavy, and one-sided textbook. ☐



Globalization: Local to Global Analysis

Globalization: Rooted in Ancient Trade and Violent Colonization

By Jada Yolich, 9th Grade, Lane Tech High School

The world economy did not appear overnight; it didn't skip over centuries of human evolution and appear just because of U.S. corporations.

Many believe that the process of globalization started with the *Silk Road*. The Silk Road was a series of passages and routes that crossed through the continent of Asia during the Han dynasty and slowly phased out near the 1400s. With travelers and traders crossing the roads, not only did the idea of the market rise, but so did interaction between various ethnic groups.

That was a much simpler version of globalization, but part of its beginning nonetheless. Other histories of *ancient trade in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Europe* also contributed to the growth of early globalization, but rarely receive credit. Some historians document people from Africa, the Americas and Asia trading with each other by traveling across large land masses or oceans before European conquerors arrived in 1492. As trade developed into what is now the global economy and increased interaction between countries, it was very recently given the name globalization. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word was first used in 1930 but its origin is unknown.

In more recent times, European-driven globalization has directly and indirectly caused the **destruction of indigenous societies and people** throughout the world. Globalization is directly related to **colonialism**. Conquistadors and "explorers" were searching for more land to "own" to increase their output of goods into the global economy, thus increasing their profit. This in turn sped up the process of globalization by increasing the dependency between countries to control land, labor, and resources.

Through the conquest of land, colonialism played a part in the capture and destruction of indigenous peoples. Its aftermath can be still be seen today. Most Americans know very few

details about the undoing of Native American societies by English Puritans, Pilgrims and future Anglo generations. Historically, Native Americans fought very hard for their freedom and independence, but didn't stand a chance against the more advanced military weapons of Europeans-turned-Americans.

Another example of globalization ruining the lives of the masses can be found in Brazil. Here's an excerpt from *Colonialism in the Americas: A Critical Look* (see right) showing how globalization has affected northeastern Brazil:

"The Northeast of Brazil, when the Portuguese settlers arrived, was fertile growing area, much of it was covered with forest. The forests were cleared to plant huge sugar plantations. By the end of the 16th century Brazil had 120 sugar mills, and all food had to be imported; all the land was used for sugar. The workers were fed a starvation diet...Now, the Brazilian Northeast is one of the poorest areas of the world. There are a few rich people - the rich owners of the land and sugar mills. Much of the land is left uncultivated; since the prices of sugar are often too low it doesn't make sense to plant it. Food is still imported, and so expensive that the sugar workers, who make starvation wages, can't afford to buy much of it."

The Portuguese created these huge sugar plantations to increase the trade market, trying to improve their economy which ties itself into globalization. In the process, they nearly destroyed ancient cultures.

So as one can see, the history of globalization is not in any way a pretty one. Although it has made richer countries even richer, it has also made poor countries even poorer. The question I'm asking is this, **Why aren't we taught the accurate histories of ancient trade, of European conquest and destruction, and of the darker side of modern globalization?** ☐



GREAT RESOURCES!

The book *Colonialism in the Americas: A Critical Look*, quoted left by Jada, is part of a great resource set reviewed by CGCT. This set covers colonialism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. They is powerful, factual, easy-to-read, and creatively presented in a zine/cartoon-based format. Learn more at www.zinnedproject.org.

An Introduction

For the most part, Chicagoans know very little about the history of Chicago's schools and curriculum. Why is that? As Root Knowledge editors are asking, **is it classified?** Are there things we're not supposed to know in the city's history of schooling - the place most children are bound to attend for 10 to 14 years and up to 16,000+ total hours of their lives? Knowing these roots, and their effects, can help us to establish more informed visions and plans for our schools today, especially at a time where various forces are re-making (or dismantling, aka, "transforming") public education.

The twisted irony is good questioning and information-based research are primary skills emphasized by the Common Core State Standards and by all critical-thinking models of significance. So then, what about Chicago's schooling history really matters for us today? This is a question I began to ask myself.

Although the history shows a mixed bag, there have been "constants" in Chicago's public schools. These are evidenced by key primary sources, historical texts, and statistical records. Overall, **six constants** in the history of Chicago's schooling emerge. Two are introduced below, with upcoming parts in this series covering the other four: **political power, classism/labor tracking, sexism/gender sorting, and controlled learning.** Each of these proliferated since the early 1800s. They also emerged as prevailing reasons for the expansion of mass public schooling in the U.S., albeit under different names such as "vocationalism" and "basic skills".

Constant #1: Immediate and Longterm Economic Gains

We don't normally think of schools as a way for some to build economic profit, but in Chicago that's exactly what happened. Public school land swindling, corporate contracts in schools, and the financial uses of schools in an extremely politically corrupt city took root. Here's just a few examples:

Throughout CPS history, the distribution of federally designated school lands (section 16) led to greed, corruption, graft, giveaways, and fund mismanagement that were, for the most part, accepted in Chicago. Mary Herrick (*The Chicago Schools*) writes, "...Illinois allowed the land to be sold without authorization and at very low rates." Douglas Bukowski (1998) writes, "From the start, Chicago schools had rivaled Chicago politics for notoriety. The first school fund was created by selling section 16 land allotted by the Land Ordinance of 1785. Proceeds of just \$38,600 came from the sale of what became downtown Chicago; the episode established a precedent for shortsighted financial planning. What property the Board of Education kept, it rented at terms agreeable to the lessee. The Daily News and the Tribune each held favorable long-term leases on prime downtown sites" (p. 18). These combined financial episodes drained much needed resources and left schools totally underfunded, sometimes not even collecting the rents and taxes due to schools. Constant claims of CPS debt resulted.

Constant #2: Systemic Racism and Deculturalization

With its oppressive forces of totally unequal education, deficit-based thinking, and mass deculturalization, systemic racism has epitomized Chicago's schooling. This especially impacted all immigrant communities, as well as growing African American, Latina/o, Native American, and Asian American communities. These forces were known more popularly as "assimilation." Over time, white supremacist thinking was often cloaked or masked by nicer-sounding terms such as "assimilation," which in actuality refers to the processes of stripping one's language, culture, histories, and identify - then acculturating or "Americanizing" people to follow "our point of view". This was launched during the 1800s with harsh intensity against Native Americans via "Indian Boarding Schools". By the late 1800s, it went mainstream.

In 1930, a "booster" civics text used in Chicago public school classrooms entitled, *Our City--Chicago*, by Cambell, Smith, and Jones (see

photos, right), instructs Chicagoans on assimilation methods. Upon entering school, kids were told to quickly conform, "Assimilation is Rapid... At first their thoughts, as we have seen, are apt to turn to the old country, but by and by, the second generation learns our language and our ways in the day schools. Many of the first generation make rapid strides in the night schools... **They become assimilated... and get our point of view...**" (pp. 384-85).

As for Native Americans, *Our City--Chicago* and other schoolbooks chose to completely brainwash children, encouraging them to think "Injuns" were violent, uncivilized, but thankfully gone. *Our City--Chicago* reprinted political cartoonist John T. McCutcheon's "Injun Summer" (1907), which instructed kids, "You know, a long time ago...there used to be heaps of Injuns around here...Don't be skeered--hain't none around here now, leastways, no live ones. They been gone this many a year. They all went away and died, so they ain't no more left" (p. xiv). Really?

This introductory series just skims the surface, with a fuller account of Chicago's school and education struggles being developed by dozens of people with CGCT, expected by 2016. It will be second offering in the curriculum series, "A Peoples Chicago: Our Stories of Change and Struggle", with the first being the Urban Renewal or Urban Removal? textset (2012). In addition, stay tuned for the next part in RK on the Little Known History of Chicago's Schools, coming in June. □

Note to RK Readers: Anton Miglietta, CGCT's Co-Director, is authoring this three part series on Chicago's history of schooling and education for CGCT's Education Book Committee, led by Asif Wilson and David Stovall. Please inquire with CGCT to learn more about this exciting work. Email us at chicagotaskforce@gmail.com.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When CGCT surveys people on their knowledge of Chicago's school history, most people know very little. Why do you think, as a whole, we know very little about the history of Chicago's schools?

Is it significant to understand the history of Chicago's schools? Why or why not?

Based on this history, what seemed to be the priorities of early schools in Chicago?

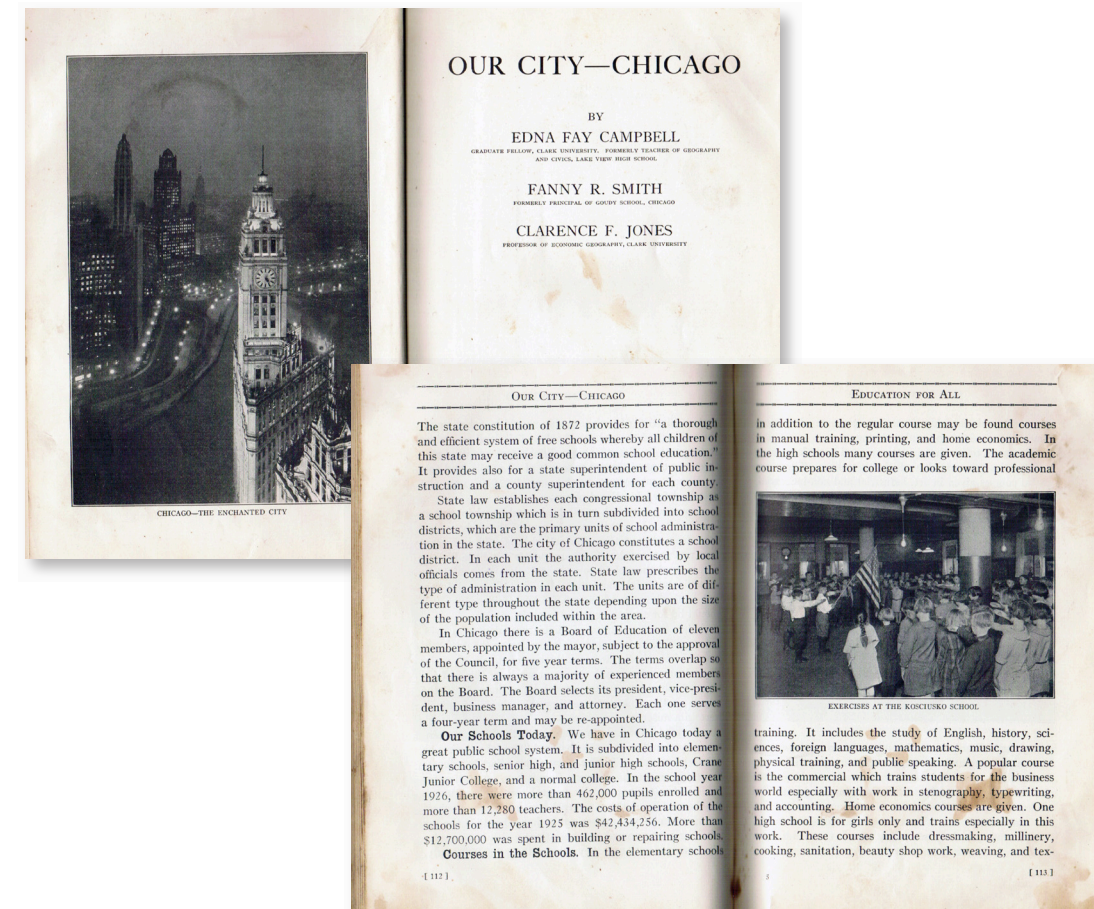
Imagine if schools were actually designed to fully educate, inspire, and motivate every student to be powerful change-makers. What would schooling and education look like if this were the case?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Are these "constants" still in place in Chicago schools?

Have they shifted?

How do communities generate more just and humane constants before miseducation engulfs yet another generation of students?



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: Interested in contributing to CGCT's Education Book, where the history and contemporary issues of Chicago's public education are explored? Let us know at (FB, twitter, email)

Chicago's School & Mayoral Politics: A Closer Look

By Alex Ng, 6th Grade, Burley Elementary School



Elected School Board

CHUY'S POSITION
"I support an elected school system because I believe there needs to be greater accountability"

We are the only school district in the state with an **appointed, not an elected school board**. Both Jesus "Chuy" Garcia and Rahm Emanuel made their opinions on the elected school board known in the recent election. The appointed school board is the exact same one that shuttered our schools in predominately Black and Latino areas, approved corrupt contracts such as CEO Barbara Byrd Bennett's \$20 million SUPES contract, and slashed school budgets. Emanuel was the only candidate to support an appointed school board. Rahm believes that politics should not be re-entered into our schools. While Chuy, who voted against the 1995 Illinois law in the legislature as a state senator that gave the mayor more CPS

RAHM'S POSITION
"...I don't think we should actually trick people by having a political campaign issue as a way to fixing our schools"

power, thinks that an **elected school board** gives a voice to adults with experience in the CPS system. Let me point out that six out of the seven appointed board members have never had children in the CPS system, and the one exception, David Vitale, sent his daughter to a private elementary school before she went to a CPS high school. By proposing an elected school board, Chuy honored the voices of those who know most about our schools. Rahm Emanuel knew that most Chicagoans support an elected school board, with 89% support on a recent referendum. He can only throw a feeble behind-the-back pass to Chicago's undecided. We saw however, on April 7th, how his big campaign dollars (\$24 million) paid off.

School Closings

CHUY'S POSITION
"We should do all in our power to undo the damage to students and neighborhoods that suffered from the needless mass closings of some 50 schools under the Emanuel regime."

Rahm's minority-bashing school closings has been his Achilles' heel. Garcia, Fioretti, Walls, and Wilson all pounded Emanuel on the matter. Emanuel has been under fire since his decision in May 2013 that sent kids, parents, teachers, and entire neighborhoods reeling. Chuy and the rest of Emanuel's challengers proclaimed Emanuel's move as needless and racist. School closings were promoted as matters of economy, yet a recent NBC 5 investigation showed that the school buildings' "utility bills are almost as much as they were when [they] were open." Emanuel wants the public to feel pity for him by saying, "the pain of the closings doesn't compare to the anguish of "trap-

RAHM'S POSITION
"The pain of the closings doesn't compare to the anguish of "trapping" kids in failing schools."

ping" kids in failing schools." If this is true, **Rahm could fund our public schools, and stop funding charters** and other private schools at a recalcitrant rate. In addition, he uses TIF (Tax Increment Financing) funds on Vienna Beef, a new basketball arena for DePaul Univ., and major companies such as Sears, K-Mart, Target, Coca-Cola, UPS, and even Wal-Mart. Now what exactly is missing from this list? Money towards education! Millions and millions of dollars are showered on these big-time companies that don't need the money. If Garcia were elected, he proposed to use the city's TIF funds to fund our CPS schools--something Rahm could have easily done.

Charter Schools

CHUY'S POSITION
"Emanuel now wants to open 22 new charters, some in areas where he closed schools because of underutilization."

Now, the general public wants to know: is Rahm's new administration about the people of Chicago, or about waiting for the precise moment to make the leap to the White House? After receiving a massive backlash from the school closings, Rahm proposed the idea to open charter schools near the sites of closed schools. That's so funny I forgot to laugh. Opening up a Noble Charter across the street from Prosser Career Academy is just plain hypocrisy. Garcia proclaimed that he would implement a moratorium on charters because he believes school choice is not what's at stake. He said that long ago, charters ceased to offer anything more than the the traditional public school

RAHM'S POSITION
"CPS is aiming to grow charter schools in areas where there aren't enough classrooms."

education because teacher unions have primarily focused more on education than making sure that teachers held their jobs. "Why charters?", Chuy asks. "Because they are the new coin of political patronage." The UNO charter group received more than \$100 million in state money, until CEO Juan Rangel's corruption in the charter network was exposed. Garcia said he would have stopped the cronyism between Rahm and the charter movement, and eliminated the starvation of public schools' funds in order to feed charter networks.

Let us remember these mayoral stances on our schools - and be more active in the next election!

Education Briefs: What's Up with CPS?

Saqib Bhatti of Roosevelt Institute and the CTU Research Dept. together with other allies held a press conference recently, releasing *Our Kind of Town: A Financial Plan that Puts Chicago's Communities First* Report, calling for progressive revenue solutions, and an end to Wall Street dictation of city finances.

Money Wasted at CPS
Testing: \$10,079,896
SUPES/
principal recruitment: \$24,500,000
Charter Expansion \$75,000,000
Sodexo Magic: \$50,000,000
AON accounting for pension attacks: \$125,000
Total 2014-15 preliminary waste at CPS = \$160,120,000

Predatory Finance
TIF Fund Surplus = \$1 billion
(\$553 million to schools)
Swap money = \$771 million
Capital Appreciation Bonds = \$195 million

Total CPS Waste along + predatory finance losses = \$2.3 billion

Alex Ng reviewed the positions of each candidate on key educational issues.

Even with the election over, we felt it was necessary to compare and contrast the recent mayoral candidates' positions on key educational concerns in order to remind ourselves of what lies ahead. Alex prepared a critical analysis of both platforms and included his own commentary on relevant issues. He feels every student should know what Emanuel is pushing for as the mayor (2015 - 2019), while seeing Chuy's platform as stemming from movements for justice. Be prepared for some sharp opinions by this 6th grader!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are the most glaring differences between these platforms?

Why does the author conclude about school closings?

Why do you think the author was more hopeful in regards to Chuy's positions?

What platforms points do you most agree with? Disagree with? Why?



- Pearson was awarded a no-bid contract of \$170 million to develop PARCC. (\$160 million went to the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium. Total: \$330 million in Federal Funds for CCSS standardized tests).
- Pearson is a British-owned educational conglomerate and 70% of their annual global revenue comes from the North American market.
- The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) signed a 4 year contract worth \$160 million just for PARCC.
- Illinois' former Superintendent, Christopher Koch, is on the governing board for PARCC.
- Pearson has all your child's personal information - IEPs, 504s, student ID's, and soon, test scores that will follow your child throughout their educational career
- PARCC scores will not be recognized by colleges but will become a high school graduation requirement. This will take effect next year.

Student Views on Testing

Opt-Out of PARCC: A Conversation Between RK Students who "Opted Out"

The following discussion is between two Root Knowledge writers, Vanessa Hensler and Allende Miglietta, both of whom decided to "opt out" of recent PARCC testing.

Vanessa: Why did you opt out?

Allende: I opted out because I wanted to. And, my friend was opting out and I didn't want to take a standardized test on the computer. My parents also wanted me to "opt out" because they think the test is irrelevant. I agree.

Allende: Why did you opt out?

Vanessa: I opted out because my mom doesn't support standardized testing.

Vanessa: What did you do when you opted out?

Allende: I sat in the same room as the kids who were sitting taking the test and I did my homework, read a book and doodled. I sat with two other kids who are also opting out.

Allende: What did you do when you opted out?

Vanessa: I got to sit in the media room where the rest of my class was taking the test. I got to read with three other students also opting out.

Vanessa: How did you feel when you opted out?

Allende: I was cold because the window was open. Also, I was bored because we sat in the computer room for three hours. It was also funny to see the teacher get angry because the test was not working in the beginning. It was also cool to hear students typing, and how fast each student typed their extended responses.

Allende: How long was your test session?

Vanessa: We didn't get a chance to do the actual PARCC test. We just had practice tests and reviews and we had to sit out for about an hour.

Vanessa: What is your opinion on opting out? Do you think others should do it?

Allende: I do believe that others should opt out unless they are curious about the test and want to take it or their parents disregard them from opting out. My opinion on opting out is that it gives you a greater chance of standing up for what you believe in, especially if you believe you should not be taking this test.

Allende: How did you feel when you were opting out?

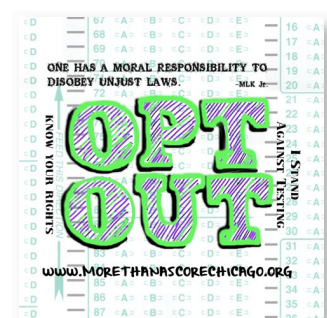
Vanessa: I felt proud that I was opting out. I felt like I was standing up against standardized testing and even though it was really boring. I knew that I was doing a good thing.

Vanessa: How should we be judged instead of by standardized tests?

Allende: I think instead of being judged by standardized tests each student should be able to show all or a few of their talents by making a portfolio and giving it to the teacher or presenting it in front of the class. We should also, like in history and science fairs, make a board on what we've learned so far in that class. Another way could be a writing portion where students write at least two pages defending what we've learned in the class or related to anything else teachers should be aware of, like the extracurricular activities. I think students should be judged on how well they write and how well they speak in class and if they do their homework or not. We should build more participation skills, and when we do participate, we can say ideas that are more relevant to topics of importance.

Allende: Instead of taking standardized tests what should students do?

Vanessa: I think we should be judged by what other work we do in school such as an action project that we do or other talents we've learned in school. This includes subjects we need to get better in and important issues in life. □



Chicago Pollution Rarely Taught in Chicago Schools

By Allende Miglietta, 8th Grade Kenwood Academy Academic Center

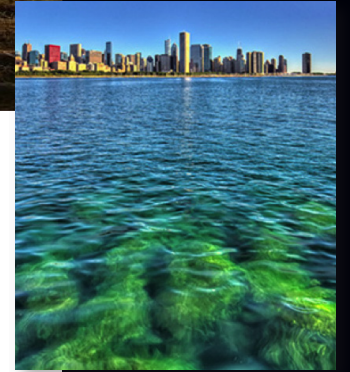
Pollution in Chicago has a wide spread affect on the city, it's people, and the environment. The pollution just doesn't come from exhaust from cars and trash people throw on the ground. It also comes from factories, especially on the South Side of Chicago and in Northwest Indiana. The pollutants seep in through the roads, water, and ride wind currents towards populated areas. However, people also have a part in polluting our city. Its not just manufacturers that cause large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and contaminants into our water, but they are largely to blame.

Here are just two examples of major pollution I've uncovered, yet never had a chance to learn about in my Environmental Science curriculum.

Polluted Waters: Scientists have found toxic hexavalent chromium in Chicago's drinking water. According to OSHA, "Hexavalent chromium [Cr(VI)] is one of the valence states (+6) of the element chromium. It is usually produced by an industrial process. Cr(VI) is known to cause cancer. In addition, it targets the respiratory system, kidneys, liver, skin and eyes."

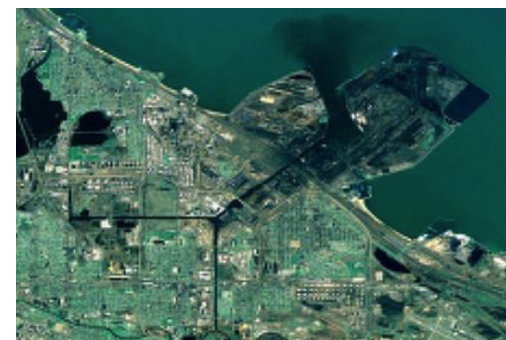
How long this has been happening? With us drinking potentially toxic drinking water, how many people have become sick or died an early death? This is not all though...test results came in from the *Chicago Tribune* that show treated Lake Michigan water for 7 million people contained about 0.23 parts per billion of toxic metal. Toxic metal is one of the causes that could increase the long-term risk of cancer. This is just in our water! The air and ground are also polluted with contamination and toxins.

Most Polluted Canal: The East Chicago canal is so polluted, it would take about 30 years to



clean up and cost about \$127 million dollars. According to Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) in East Chicago: Environmental Justice Case Study "There is an estimated 4.7 million cubic yards of contaminated sediment in both the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal and the Grand Calumet River." This river, according to local environmentalists, is the most polluted canal in the world! Why haven't we studied this?

During my 9 years of schooling with CPS, I'm upset that I have **never been taught/learned about pollution in Chicago**, even in my 7th grade Environmental Science course. During that course, not one word came out of anyone's mouth about Chicago and its pollution, or even the environment in general. The closest thing we learned about was Asian Carp in Lake Michigan. This should not be what our future holds for us. We should change this and talk about Chicago and the sources of its pollutants. I believe we should learn about the pollution in our city, how it affects the people and the environment, and what we can do about it. □



This aerial view of East Chicago, Indiana reveals the toxins released into the water



Nuestra Raza: Chi-Town Arts

By Lucero Segundo, CGCT College Intern

On 26th and Pulaski in Chicago's South Lawndale community behind the Second Federal Savings Bank stands **Nuestra Raza**, the mural. On the bottom right corner is text dating the mural to 2002 and naming the painter, **Vicente Mendoza**, and his assistants, James Sanchez, Cindy Rodriguez, Victor Reyes, Héctor Torres, Ricardo Mendoza, and Carlos Sanchez.

The mural is composed of warm browns and cool greens along with purples and golds. The mural depicts many Chican@ icons, the strong Aztec, Benito Juarez, Guadalupe Hidalgo, Zapata, Cesar Chavez, and Chicago's own Rudy Lozano. Although Chicago is more than 1,000 miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border, this mural shows how Chican@s, Mexican-Americans that embrace their native ancestors, have and continue to struggle time and time again for their rights in the United States of America. The mural depicts how people of Mexican origins choose to identify as Chican@ based on their experience as being between "Mexican" and "American". The history of Latin@ communities in the Midwest, for example, are largely forgotten and a popular perception is that the Southwest U.S. is the only place of Chican@ activism. What **Nuestra Raza** does is provide evidence that there is a history of Brown power in the U.S. Midwest, including Chicago.

It's important to pay homage to these public works of art, but critique is also a part of truly appreciating something. For example, the mural plays into the idea of *mestizaje*, or the idea that Mexicans and their descendants are a mix between the indigenous and the Spanish conquistadores. First, it is important to recognize that the native peoples of what is now called Mexico consist of a diversity of language, religion, traditions, and even conflict between many different native communities. In addition, it's important to know that if we think of people of Mexican descent as only having white European and native ancestors, then we are also forgetting our Black ancestors and the Black presence in Mexico.

What does it mean that this work of art is outside of the traditional art museum? For one, by taking up a wall on the street and marking it with Chican@ iconography allows the people of that community to take an ordinary space and turn it into a meaningful place. Deciding that you want your artwork in public, despite being vulnerable to the effects of nature, to be part of and interact with the people of the community. Having your art outside of the museum means that you refuse to mold your work based on the Eurocentric standards of "high art". Personally, I'm for an art where I can get close to it and touch it. **Art that's part of a community allows us to look back into the past as a way to imagine a new future.** □

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you know who the people depicted in the mural are? What significant contributions have they made and how do they affect you? If not, why do you think that is?

Have you seen this mural before?

Let us know what you think at rootknowledge.tumblr.com or email us at rkcgcot@gmail.com

Mascots: Cheering On the Wrong Side of History

By Jaime Camargo
CGCT College Intern



Football season is now over but there is still plenty of talk on a specific issue surrounding the NFL (National Football League). That topic, the controversial name of the Washington "Redskins", remains in the minds of many people, both off and on the gridiron. **So why is this name so problematic?** Well let's first define that the term "redskin" means. The term originated from the bounties put on indigenous, or Native Americans, by white men who hunted for different kinds of skins to trade. Yes you heard right. Unfortunately, they didn't just hunt animal skins but also had the audacity to pursue the scalps of humans or indigenous people in this case. The color the scalps gave off was a reddish color, and thus, they were often referred to as *redskins*.¹



For centuries now, indigenous folks have fought against the derogatory term that is now used as a mascot for the Washington football team. Their efforts have been productive as they have raised more awareness to the problem and have gained support to remove the name from the football franchise. Appropriating images of Indigenous people is not unusual. Many other teams from different sport also use natives peoples identity to convert them into mascots.

So how does this relate to you here in Chicago?

1. <http://www.aics.org/mascot/redskins.html>

This is happening in our public schools as well. There are several CPS schools that use the imagery of indigenous people as mascots. For example, the mascot for Lane Tech College Prep High School is currently the Lane Tech Indians. Some people are ok with keeping the mascot but others have spoken out against it. Jada Yolich, a current Lane Tech 9th grade scholar, expresses her concern on the schools offensive mascot:

"As a student at Lane, I didn't initially see what was wrong with the mascot being an Indian. It seemed like any other mascot. But once I had heard with the whole Redskins controversy, I realized that Lane's Indian was very similar to that of Washington's Redskin. Now that I understand how Native Americans can take offense to Lane's mascot being an Indian, I feel sort of ashamed that no one has tried to change the mascot, including myself. It is a disservice to Native Americans everywhere."

Does your school have an offensive mascot that you don't feel comfortable with and want to do something about it? Spread the word and your concern to your friends. Chances are that you're not alone. There are numerous ways to combat the issue such as starting a **petition**, set up an **event** to explain why these mascots are problematic or just speaking to **your principle**. □

Tour Spotlight on East Chicago, Indiana

By Lindsay Smith and Adrian Saavedra

Grassroots Community Tours are building in **Brighton Park, Lakeview, Pilsen, Little Village, Humboldt Park, Uptown, Bucktown, Logan Square and East Chicago, Indiana**. These nine tours will document the people's histories straight from the residents who have made these communities vibrant. Additionally, the tours will produce learning tools to learn local Chicago history through the eyes of students that we'll never get from textbooks.

Right now, walking tours are developing, websites are building, connections are strengthening between young people across the city and state lines, and on May 15 all nine schools and organizations come together to showcase their neighborhood tours in bold and creative ways. The power of the tours can be summed up below by **Adrian Saavedra, a Greenhouse Fellow** from East Chicago, Indiana.

I remember in the beginning of the year our Executive Director and Associate Director had us, the fellows, work on making a community tour. We all questioned what was a community tour and what did we need to make one for. Not one fellow was up for the task, but we all knew we had to get it done. The community tour took hours to construct, and while we didn't see the purpose at the moment, I see it now. The tour required a lot of research, which helped bring my city to a **brand new light for me**. We also met people who grew up in East Chicago and had stories to tell us about their own experiences.

All of this brought great pride to me as an East Chicagoan, to know that we were once the home to seventy plus ethnic groups. I also discovered areas in East Chicago that I had never visited. I gained all this new knowledge, from one assign-

ment. This is why I fully encourage the teaching of community tours. It gives the people the chance to learn from their own hometown and take pride in it. By learning from your own community, you can then teach others where you're from. It can also unite community members from other communities who share similar cultures or experience as your own.

CGCT recently participated in the Greenhouse Fellowship's tour of East Chicago (E.C.). In a two hour tour the Fellows broke down the economic history of East Chicago, pointing out some of the steel factories that have wreaked havoc on E.C. through exploitative working conditions and tax loopholes. The Fellows have a sharp eye for injustice and it's affects on the people of E.C., but also for the network of people, places and institutions in East Chicago that make them proud of who they are where they come from. And as we passed East Chicago Central High School they belted out their high school fight song reminding us that "East Chicago hearts are united."

Now imagine students building Grassroots Community Tours and kicking off every school year by leading the teachers and administration on a tour of their neighborhood - shining the light on all that makes them proud and investigate the aspects that they want to be a part of changing.

That's the power of community based curriculum: to **position the students as the educators and the teachers as the learners** and to be the authors of our own stories. Ask your teacher to join Community Tours for **2015-16**. □



What to do on the Grassroots Community Tours webpages:

Access the free 12-page Grassroots Community Tour Development Guide

Download useful materials to create your own Tour

See the beautiful Every Neighborhood has a Story map of Chicago

Explore powerful examples of Tours in booklet and web formats

Sign up for next year!

What to do at grassrootscurriculum.org:

Download FREE copies of Root Knowledge!

Watch Reversing the Learning Crisis

See actual Grassroots Community Tour guides straight from the classroom and access the materials to create a Tour

Explore CGCT's work in teacher education by reviewing critical units made by students

Access curriculum such as excerpts from Urban Renewal or Urban Removal? to opt-out testing alternatives

Learn more about curriculum building materials like curriculum shaping circles and the Grassroots Curriculum Toolkit 4.0 and processes to build student voice in the classroom

Find out ways to get involved!

Dear Friends and Supporters of Root Knowledge,

First, I'd like to congratulate Root Knowledge for yet another eye-opening issue of their journal. It's an honor to work in solidarity with such an inspiring group of young folks! It's been a busy winter for us at CGCT—here are a few highlights:

Root Knowledge is the recipient of two foundation grants, in recognition and support of their amazing work: **What Kids Can Do's 2014 Youth Research for Action grant** and **Crossroads Fund's Youth Fund grant**. Congratulations to Root Knowledge, and thank you to What Kids Can Do and Crossroads Fund for your generosity and support of our youth!

CGCT and **Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago** (AAAJ Chicago) are building connections between Root Knowledge and AAAJ Chicago's **KINETIC** youth group. Root Knowledge presented at AAAJ **Chicago's Asian American Leadership Forum** in January; the forum theme was "Justice Beyond Just Us." In March, CGCT staff and Root Knowledge youth traveled to Springfield with KINETIC, to advocate against budget cuts to the Immigrant Services Line Item. It was a tremendous opportunity to as we learned to tap into the power of personal stories to influence the hearts and minds of decision-makers.

CGCT is also building a "sister-city" partnership with the **Greenhouse Fellowship in East Chicago, Indiana**. Greenhouse Fellowship provides recent high school graduates a year-long opportunity through which they undergo a variety of experiences that equip them with tools of civic engagement and social service. We've been learning with and from the Greenhouse Fellows



through their participation in CGCT's Grassroots Community Tours program, and we'll be spending time with them in East Chicago this spring.

On May 28th, we co-hosted our **5th Annual Grassroots Education Forum** with our partners, Northeastern Illinois University's College of Education. This year's forum theme was "**Critical Education Matters: Reversing Post-Traumatic School Syndrome**," to acknowledge the crisis moment we are experiencing in public education and society at large, and to call for teaching as education justice activism and organizing, inside and outside classroom walls.

CGCT engages in community organizing. Together with a coalition of many community groups, CGCT mobilized to support the **Elected Representative School Board** advisory referendum, which was overwhelmingly (almost 90%) endorsed in 37 city wards on election day in February. CGCT is also a convener of the **Chicago Education Assembly (CEA)**. On June 6th, 2015, the CEA will host a mock assembly and training led by the Chicago Student Union, Kuumba Lynx, Raise Your Hand, Morrill School, Uplift Community School, RK and others. Join us!

Thank you for supporting and building with CGCT and Root Knowledge! Hope to see you soon.

Cecily Henster, Co-Director, CGCT

RK Student Team

Jaime Camargo
 Pedro Gonzalez
 Vanessa Hensler
 Allende Miglietta
 Alex Ng
 Juan Ramirez
 Cinthya Rodriguez
 Lucero Segundo
 Jada Yolich
 (Your name here!)

Graphic Designers

Lisa Lindsay
 Lucero Segundo

Art and Photography

Terrence T.zEye Haymer
 Matt Tuteur

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Order a classroom set of Root Knowledge by emailing us at: chicagotaskforce@gmail.com and respond to the following questions:

- 1 Provide us with some background about yourself and the youth group / classroom?
- 2 How will you utilize the Root Knowledge journal in the classroom / youth group?
- 3 Are you committing to utilizing each quarterly issue?
- 4 Are you committing to following through in helping students/youth submit a piece?
- 5 Indicate if you can pick up the copies at 4554 N. Broadway, Chicago, ste 326
- 6 If able to pay shipping costs (\$5 or less for classroom set), please provide your mailing information.

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Check out the CGCT catalog webpage for online purchases.



Urban Renewal or Urban Removal? and the Student Learning and Action Journal



Grassroots Curriculum Toolkit 4.0 (great for teachers and student-teachers)

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